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Thailand: Opposition wins municipal elections.
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Thailand: The Democratic Party has won its first electoral test of strength with the government.

The Democrats took 22 of 24 seats in the voting for the Bangkok municipal assembly on 1 September. Three recognized government slates managed to elect only one progovernment candidate. The election, the first meaningful one in Thailand in ten years, was orderly and relatively clean, although some cases of government chicanery were reported.

Widely interpreted as an important political barometer, the election results could have a significant impact on key legislative elections scheduled for early next year. The Democrats, the only nationwide opposition party currently active, came out of the election substantially strengthened. Their showing may attract some other antigovernment elements to rally behind their banner, although the party does not appear to have much following in the countryside.

The election is a major disappointment to those elements within the government who hoped that a Democratic Party defeat in Bangkok, its traditional area of strength, would clear the way for an easy government victory in the legislative elections. The setback in Bangkok comes as a particularly bitter pill, since it represents a repudiation of the municipal leadership which has been associated with Deputy Prime Minister Praphat. One consequence of the election will be to strengthen the hand of Prime Minister Thanom in the factional wrangling with Praphat.

The election results indicate that the government will have to put aside its squabbling and marshal its considerable resources to guarantee a clear-cut victory in next year's legislative elections.

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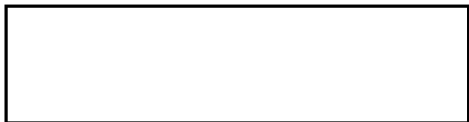
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